

Police chief reacts to letter about retention

DEAR EDITOR:

I wanted to take a moment and address a Letter to the Editor that was printed in your newspaper on May 18, 2016. The letter stated concerns about staffing in the Cobb County Police Department.

Let me begin by saying that the men and women of the Cobb County Police Department appreciate the concern and support of our citizens. Our officers do an outstanding job every day protecting the people of Cobb County, and the backing of the community is paramount to their success.

However, I feel like it is equally important to offer a clarification of our staffing levels, and address some of the issues commonly found in large law enforcement organizations.

It is true that 73 officers left our police force in 2015. It should be noted, however, that historically there is a natural attrition of officers which occurs every year, and our current and future staffing plans account for those occurrences. For example, of the 73 officers that left Cobb County last year, 36 left during the training phase; meaning they were unable to complete training for any number of reasons (i.e. poor academic performance, failed firearms testing, etc.). An additional 15 officers retired. The remaining 22 left for a multitude of reasons such as medical issues, relocation out of state, or choosing a different career.

That being said, my command staff and I are constantly looking at our processes to ensure that we are attracting, training and retaining the best possible people for Cobb County. In August of 2015, with unanimous support and funding from the Board of Commissioners, we implemented the Police Improvement Plan. This plan was the result of research that indicated our incentive package was, at the time, not as strong as it needed to be. Incentives such as shift differential pay, educational incentive pay and assigned cars were included in the plan. Additionally, the 80 officers approved by the board would allow all precincts to move to 10 hour shifts which provide overlapping efficiency and greater safety for both officers and citizens. Currently, three out of five precincts have transitioned to this staffing format.

Our hiring numbers are showing positive results from the improvement plan implementation as well. For the past two years, we have hired more officers than have left the county and have doubled our required mandate classes from two times per year to four. We expect to see these trends continue.

I'm very pleased to report that since its inception, the Police Improvement Plan has eliminated the concerns we had previously about officer retention. With on-going board support, we are able to offer a completely comprehensive incentive package for our officers. In fact, there seems to be a more recent trend of state certified police officers coming to Cobb County as opposed to our officers leaving to go to work for another police department.

The bottom line is that the Cobb County Police Department is the best in the state and we are staffed to appropriately protect and serve the people of this county. Our hiring and training efforts create the most sought after police officers in the region. And while we cannot always predict or control the number of officers who leave for various reasons, I am proud of our ability to attract and retain our officers and confident that we will have the continued support of the Board of Commissioners going forward.

John R. Houser

Chief of Police